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carefully and judiciously elaborated by the author, and in the mechanical execution and the revision of the press remarkably correct, even as to the minute diacritical marks, cannot fail to be received with wide acceptance. Mr. Worcester is already known and valued as the author of the *Comprehensive Dictionary*, published sixteen years ago, a convenient manual, approved by all who have used or examined it. A large portion of the intermediate time has been devoted by him to preparation for this larger work, which is far more complete than any other of the kind ; and although, in the progress of the arts and sciences, of invention, and it may be, of intellectual philosophy, it is doubtless destined at some time beyond our ken to be superseded, we may confidently predict that it will survive one generation.

ART. VII. — *Urania, a Rhymed Lesson, pronounced before the Mercantile Library Association, October 14, 1846.*

By OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES. Second Edition.
Boston : W. D. Ticknor & Co. 8vo. pp. 32.

THIS is the modest and rather enigmatical title of a very lively and beautiful poem. The public have anticipated our favorable verdict upon it ; though less than three months have elapsed since its delivery, it has already passed to a second edition. It may have attained a third for aught that we know, as the first issue was exhausted almost as soon as it was announced. In these prosaic times, when quite good poetry is absolutely a drug in the market, and fugitive rhymes are so very fugitive that they are forgotten about as quickly as they are uttered, that a poet should so speedily acquire and retain the ear of the public is an indication either of remarkable ability, or of still more remarkable good fortune. In the present state of the reading world, immediate popularity, we believe, is no bad proof of the excellence of poetry, though it would certainly be a very insufficient test of merit in the case of philosophy or science. He who sings for the public, and cannot find a grateful audience, would do better to keep his music to himself. If the multitude neglect him, it is pretty

good proof that he ought to be neglected. He may become fashionable with a certain class, the idol of a particular school, the bard of a clique or a coterie ; but he is no true poet, unless he can excite the imaginations and move the feelings of all men. It is his business to strike chords which find a response in every bosom, to present analogies which are perceptible to every mind, to command the passions which are the universal attribute of human nature. If his verse needs explanation or comment, if one must be educated before he can understand it, or go through a particular training before he can appreciate it, the busy world will pass it by, and will lose very little by its neglect.

Of course, we exclude the cases of factitious and short-lived popularity, where an audience is gained by an appeal to casual associations or temporary prejudices, or perhaps by the arts of a mountebank. The favor of the public, which is at once the test and the reward of excellence, cannot be acquired by humoring the weakness or flattering the prejudices of the multitude. These peccant humors are transitory in their very nature ; and when they die out, the good-will which was conciliated only by attention to them must also disappear. To found one's claim to notice upon these momentary follies or excitements is as much a violation of the catholic character of true poetry, as to write in a manner which can be understood and relished only by a few persons of unusual learning and abilities, or of peculiar tastes. Aristocratic and gentlemanly poetry is the least enduring of all fashionable follies. The euphuisms of Queen Elizabeth's time, the rhymed tragedies imitated from the French after the Restoration, the Della Cruscan school of the last century, and the forced raptures and mystical babblings of sundry inspired bards in our own day are among the choicest fruits of this narrow and exclusive spirit. They are received with great clapping of hands by the " select few " ; but the people stare and ignore them altogether.

Poetry was eminently popular in its origin. Wandering bards sang their metrical legends and hymns in honor of the gods at great public festivals, or at solemn entertainments held by chiefs and kings. The earliest poetry of almost every nation in Europe is in the form of songs and ballads, many of which embody the historical traditions of the country, or give expression to the religious ideas of the people. These rude

verses were sung in every hut, and by the groups around the watchfires in every warlike expedition. They were preserved only in the memory, but there they found a safe resting-place, and were handed down uninjured from father to son, through many successive generations. They had more influence than laws or governments in forming the customs and determining the characters of a whole people. Their peculiar charms, their simplicity and directness, their force and pathos, can be appreciated even now by any taste that is not morbidly refined. It is more than probable that rhyme, assonance, and metre were first contrived as aids to the memory, or as a system of mnemonics, before writing was invented or introduced, and while poetry, religious dogmas, and laws existed only as they were remembered by the multitude. The drama, too, the second great source of poetry, was contrived for the entertainment of the great body of the people, and was carefully adapted to their tastes. Vast crowds filled those immense amphitheatres which no roof could cover, and pronounced judgment from which there was no appeal on the merits of poet and player both. The same plays, which now tax the learning and the patience of the most accomplished scholars, were once the daily entertainment of the populace of Athens.

The progress of civilization and refinement changes all this, and poetry, which was designed to be the daily food of the multitude, becomes the exclusive prerogative of the few. And just in proportion as its audience is diminished and its scope narrowed, its simplicity, vigor, and freshness begin to pass away. It lapses into spasmodic and unnatural effort, feeble imitation, or sickly refinement. It glitters with cold conceits, is varnished over with tame elegance, and chastened into a languid conformity with rules. False sentiment, vagaries in taste, and absurdities in speculation are faults to which classes and small circles of men are prone ; they gain no foothold in the intellect of a whole people. There is a corrective power in numbers ; when several thousand children sing in unison, as at the yearly meeting in St. Paul's cathedral, the discords are all absorbed in the flood of sound, and the effect upon the ear is that of perfect accord. So in matters of taste and opinion ; opposite errors balance each other, and the resultant is more likely to lie in the true direction than either of the component forces. Plain good sense, an ear for

the harmony of numbers, excitable feelings, and a tolerably quick perception of analogies are among the ordinary endowments of our common nature ; and these are all the qualifications in his hearers which a poet ought to require. If he goes farther, and presupposes in them a considerable amount of learning, or a power of following metaphysical refinements and the nicest subtilties of thought and expression, he must not complain if the wearied listeners gradually lose patience and leave him alone. We have no regard for the common complaint, that a certain poet is unduly neglected, or his works censured without just cause, merely because the public will not embrace his theory, and look at them from his point of view. It is not the world's business to satisfy the poet's requisitions ; it is his duty to conform to theirs. If he will address himself to tastes and opinions which are held only by a few, he must not grumble if those few compose the whole circle of his admirers. His province is to appeal chiefly to the imagination and the passions, and these are strongest where the reasoning powers are least cultivated ; they exist in the highest vigor, and are manifested with the least restraint, in the very multitude whose verdict he is seeking to avoid or set aside.

We are not aiming at paradox, or endeavouring to sanction an appeal from the opinion of the judicious few to the arbitrary judgments of the mob. In all cases which depend on an induction from facts or a comparison of instances, or wherever the reasoning faculty is concerned, the opinion of the multitude, as such, is not worth a straw ; we look not to the quantity, but to the quality, of the voices rendered in judgment. But a relish for the beauties of poetry is an intuitive perception, and is most likely to be true and just when expressed with the least study or hesitation. It does not admit of analysis, and if we must make an effort before it can be obtained, or must go back to argument in order to justify it, it is most probably perverted and wrong.

One of the latest stages in the decline of poetry is the formation of a number of distinct schools, and the multiplication of mannerisms. Even now, the establishment of what may be called the Wordsworthian school augurs no good for the future. It is a great triumph, indeed, for a poet to have formed the very taste by which his works are judged ; but that taste is more likely to be correct which does not require to be *formed* at all, which needs no study, theorizing, or

laborious cultivation, but springs up spontaneously whenever the right chord is struck. A particular school is always animated and kept together by a spirit of exclusiveness ; it will tolerate no excellence out of its own bounds. If Mr. Wordsworth and his disciples are right to the full extent of their theory, more than half of our English poets must come down from their pride of place, and be content to be ranked with the writers of prose. If the many feeble, tame, and creeping passages of the *Excursion* are not merely to be defended as breathing-places in a long poem, but to be held up as models for imitation, then the popular taste, which admires the awful sublimities of Milton, the exquisite finish of Goldsmith, or the magnificent lyrics of Campbell, is all wrong. Things so utterly dissimilar cannot be ranked together merely as different kinds of excellence ; if the one is beauty, the other is deformity. The judgment of the multitude is never warped by communion with the bigoted partialities of these poetical sects ; it is more catholic, and for the same reason more natural and true. The people have neither time nor inclination to be initiated into the mysteries of a fraternity ; they will not study the new code of laws, but will adhere steadfastly to the ancient customs of the realm of poesy.

The conclusion of the whole matter is, that a neglected poet has no right to murmur ; if he has failed to please, after a trial of reasonable length, the fault is his own. To impart pleasure, not to instruct, is the great object of poetry ; if he has not succeeded in doing this, it is a sign that he has missed his vocation. Of course, we are now speaking of the reception of a poet's works, and not of the treatment which he has met in person. Milton, and many others, have had good cause to complain that they had fallen on evil days and evil tongues ; but what they have lost in one capacity they were sure to gain in another. Justice is infallibly rendered in the long run to the poet, though it is often denied to the man.

Dr. Holmes will not object to our doctrine, if he judges only from his own experience. Though he has published very little, he is one of the most popular of American poets, and the corollary from our theorem is, that he deserves all his reputation. Some may object, that much of his popularity is to be ascribed to the exuberance of his wit, in which he easily surpasses all his contemporaries excepting Hood. To this we answer, that wit may justly be considered as one

of the brightest ornaments of poetry ; and in his case, as well as in that of his English predecessor to whom we have just alluded, it is by no means unattended by the higher and more characteristic excellences of his profession. His fancy teems with bright and appropriate images, and these are woven into his plan usually with exquisite finish and grace. His artistic merits are very great ; his versification is never slovenly, nor his diction meagre or coarse ; and many of his shorter pieces are inwrought with so much fire and imagination as to rank among our best lyrics.

This is high praise, and in order to justify it, we should find it necessary to quote rather from the volume of his collected poems, which was published here some years since, and afterwards republished in England, than from the brief "rhymed lesson," quite local and occasional in character, which is now before us. But we must not make citations from a work which is in the hands of nearly all our readers, while the choicer portions of it are as familiar to them as the songs of their childhood. *Urania* — a title which for some inexplicable reason he has chosen to annex to this later publication — has some striking faults ; but it has also characteristic passages enough to support our high estimate of the writer's powers. It is a mere medley of bright thoughts and laughing satire, with here and there a momentary expression of deep feeling, which betrays a spirit that may be touched to nobler issues. The poet glances about like a butterfly from one topic to another, hardly resting on any one long enough to obtain more than a sip of its honey. The versification is uniformly flowing and harmonious, and the lines are never bolstered out with feeble or unmeaning expressions. The following description of a Sabbath morning in the city, though it has so many local allusions that one who is not familiar with the streets and churches of Boston can see but in part its admirable adaptation to the scene, may still serve as a favorable specimen of the poem. We can quote only a portion of it.

"The air is hushed ; the street is holy ground ;
Hark ! The sweet bells renew their welcome sound ;
As one by one awakes each silent tongue,
It tells the turret whence its voice is flung.

"The Chapel, last of sublunary things
That shocks our echoes with the name of King's,

Whose bell, just glistening from the font and forge,
Rolled its proud requiem for the second George,
Solemn and swelling, as of old it rang,
Flings to the wind its deep, sonorous clang ;—
The simpler pile, that, mindful of the hour
When Howe's artillery shook its half-built tower,
Wears on its bosom, as a bride might do,
The iron breastpin which the ' Rebels ' threw,
Wakes the sharp echoes with the quivering thrill
Of keen vibrations, tremulous and shrill ;—
Aloft, suspended in the morning's fire,
Crash the vast cymbals from the Southern spire ;—
The Giant, standing by the elm-clad green,
His white lance lifted o'er the silent scene,
Whirling in air his brazen goblet round,
Swings from its brim the swollen floods of sound ;—
While, sad with memories of the olden time,
The Northern Minstrel pours her tender chime,
Faint, single tones, that spell their ancient song,
But tears still follow as they breathe along.

" Child of the soil, whom fortune sends to range
Where man and nature, faith and customs, change,
Borne in thy memory, each remembered tone
Mourns on the winds that sigh in every zone.
When Ceylon sweeps thee with her perfumed breeze
Through the warm billows of the Indian seas ;
When, ship and shadow blended both in one,
Flames o'er thy mast the equatorial sun,
From sparkling midnight to refulgent noon
Thy canvas swelling with the still monsoon ;
When through thy shrouds the wild tornado sings,
And thy poor seabird folds her tattered wings,
Oft will delusion o'er thy senses steal,
And airy echoes ring the Sabbath peal !
Then, dim with grateful tears, in long array
Rise the fair town, the island-studded bay,
Home, with its smiling board, its cheering fire,
The half-choked welcome of the expecting sire,
The mother's kiss, and, still if aught remain,
Our whispering hearts shall aid the silent strain.—
Ah, let the dreamer o'er the taffrail lean,
To muse unheeded, and to weep unseen ;
Fear not the tropic's dew, the evening's chills,
His heart lies warm among his triple hills ! "

These are vigorous and striking lines, which no living poet certainly need be ashamed to own. The deep and holy sentiment which pervades the latter portion of them may suffice to convince those of their error who have hitherto regarded Dr. Holmes only as a rhyming Momus. There are many felicities of expression in them which show great mastery of style, and perfect familiarity with the well of English unde-filed. This, indeed, is one of the characteristic merits of our bard. His diction is uniformly terse, precise, and vigorous, never cheating the ear with sound that veils an ambiguity of meaning, nor violating by a hair's breadth the established usages of language. His words ring clear and shrill, like good coin tried on the counter. He has entire command of Anglo-Saxon phraseology, and the most familiar turns of speech, without ever sinking into baldness or vulgarity ; and he often adapts colloquial expressions to his purpose with a felicity of setting which reminds one of Dean Swift. To illustrate and confirm this praise, we quote from the lighter and more satirical portion of the poem. There is much good sense, as well as pungent wit, in the following passage, and no one will deny its applicability to the race of whom it is spoken.

“ Be firm ! one constant element in luck
Is genuine, solid, old Teutonic pluck ;
See yon tall shaft ; it felt the earthquake's thrill,
Clung to its base, and greets the sunrise still.

“ Stick to your aim ; the mongrel's hold will slip,
But only crowbars loose the bulldog's grip ;
Small as he looks, the jaw that never yields
Drags down the bellowing monarch of the fields !

“ Yet in opinions look not always back ;
Your wake is nothing, mind the coming track ;
Leave what you 've done for what you have to do ;
Don't be “ consistent,” but be simply true.

“ Don't catch the fidgets ; you have found your place
Just in the focus of a nervous race,
Fretful to change, and rabid to discuss,
Full of excitements, always in a fuss.
Think of the patriarchs ; then compare as men
These lean-cheeked maniacs of the tongue and pen !
Run, if you like, but try to keep your breath ;
Work like a man, but don't be worked to death ;

And with new notions, — let me change the rule, —
Don't strike the iron till it 's slightly cool.

“ Choose well your *set* ; our feeble nature seeks
The aid of clubs, the countenance of cliques ;
And with this object, settle first of all
Your weight of metal and your size of ball.
Track not the steps of such as hold you cheap, —
Too mean to prize, though good enough to keep.
The ‘ real, genuine, no-mistake Tom ‘Thumbs’
Are little people fed on great men's crumbs.
Yet keep no followers of that hateful brood
That basely mingles with its wholesome food
The tumid reptile, which, the poet said,
Doth wear a precious jewel in his head.

“ If the wild filly, ‘ Progress,’ thou wouldst ride,
Have young companions ever at thy side ;
But, wouldst thou stride the stanch old mare, ‘ Success,’
Go with thine elders, though they please thee less.”

pp. 17 – 19.

If we did not respect the author's privilege of copyright, we should end by transferring the whole poem to our pages. But we have quoted enough to excite the curiosity of our readers to see the remainder, and to give some idea of the variety and productiveness of the poet's resources. He has shown much versatility of power, and we hope, on greeting him again, to find that he has been wandering in some of the higher walks of poesy. Let him not seek excuse for keeping his wings folded, on the ground that his daily pursuits confine him to the prosaic side of life. He gives a laughing sketch, indeed, of the incongruity between the subjects of thought that are commended to him by his profession, and these furtive offerings to the Muse. But *Æsculapius* was the favorite son of *Apollo*, and the two deities were often worshipped at the same shrine. They will not quarrel with each other, if our author's homage is divided between them ; nor can he be said to abandon the healing art who worships also the god of the silver bow, the slayer of the *Python*, and the author of the oracular responses given at *Delphi*. There are golden hours of leisure even in the practice of a successful physician, and these at least may be consecrated to more ambitious uses.